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SUBJECT: MILINKEVICH APPEALS TO US AMBASSADOR FOR  
ASSISTANCE

Ref: A) Minsk 1205

Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On October 26, Aleksandr Milinkevich discussed with Ambassador his campaign activities following the October 1-2 democratic congress (ref A). He was relatively pleased with his efforts to pull together a unified campaign team, and was cautiously optimistic he and his team could present a formidable challenge to President Lukashenko's grip on popular support. However, Milinkevich admitted the real purpose of his meeting with Ambassador was to stress the urgent need for quicker, more coordinated international financial assistance. The presidential candidate felt embarrassed about having to make a special appeal to the U.S. Ambassador and stressed his gratitude for U.S. assistance thus far, but he pointed out the economic plight of his campaign demanded his immediate personal involvement. End Summary.

Focus Is Not On Electoral Victory, But Voter Support  
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¶2. (C) Aleksandr Milinkevich, 10+ coalition presidential nominee, told Ambassador and Pol/Econ Chief the aim of his campaign is not to beat President Lukashenko in the 2006 presidential elections. He recognizes the President probably has already determined the election results. Milinkevich noted his focus remains almost exclusively on broadening popular support for democratic change, with the upcoming elections serving as a catalyzing event for mass protests. Milinkevich believes the starting point for building popular support is a unified democratic alliance.

10+ Leaders Offered Key Positions In Milinkevich Campaign  
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¶3. (C) Milinkevich pointed out that immediately after his nomination a crisis ensued in the coalition. Sergey Kalyakin, leader of the pro-democracy Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) and third-place finisher in the congress, and Anatoly Lebedko, head of the United Civic Party (UCP) and runner-up candidate, apparently were disappointed with the results of the congress. To prevent the disintegration of the coalition, Milinkevich offered Kalyakin the position

of campaign manager and Lebedko whatever position he wanted in the campaign (besides campaign manager). Lebedko chose the position of head of the national committee, which is the policy group that will devise the coalition's principal strategy proposals and plans for Belarus as if it were a shadow government.

14. (C) Milinkevich said that he had hoped to have his close colleague Victor Karnyenko as campaign manager but in the end made a compromise to maintain Kalyakin's support. Karnyenko is now Kalyakin's deputy on the campaign team. Milinkevich also agreed to have Belarusian National Front (BNF) leader Vintsuk Vyachorka, BPC member Aleksandr Dobrovolsky, and other party leaders serve as key members in the campaign. (Note: A more detailed report on the campaign staff and their particular responsibilities will be sent septel). However, Milinkevich considers his greatest asset in the regions is the NGO community (from which he came), not the political parties.

#### Further Consolidation of Democratic Forces A Difficult Task

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15. (C) Milinkevich told Ambassador he is making every effort to unite the democratic forces behind his candidacy, but thus far the other presidential hopefuls remain elusive. He said that former Agricultural Minister Vasily Leonov felt particularly slighted because Lebedko previously had offered Leonov the position of national committee head but Lebedko ultimately took the position for himself. The Milinkevich team will try to persuade Leonov to take up the post as commander of the "Eastern Front," working his contacts in Russia to support the campaign.

Milinkevich was not sure Leonov would accept the position. He noted former Parliamentary Speaker Aleksandr Voitovich might work with them, but Voitovich thus far has conditioned his support on financial compensation. (Comment: Voitovich suggested to Ambassador on October 12 he is determined to convince Milinkevich to support a Voitovich candidacy, not the other way around. More information on this conversation will be sent septel.)

16. (C) Milinkevich acknowledged former Belarusian State University Rector Anatoly Kozulin has refused to join the 10+ coalition and had indicated he will run on his own. Milinkevich added that the "Free Belarus" coalition of Irina Krasovskaya, Andrey Sannikov, Pavel Demesz and Bruce Jackson had always been somewhat hostile to the single candidate process but he has successfully won their support for his candidacy.

#### No Question About It - Lukashenko Is A Worthy Opponent

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17. (C) Milinkevich is under no illusion about President Lukashenko's power and talent as a politician. The 10+ nominee even noted he will learn a lot from Lukashenko during the electoral campaign. Milinkevich also recognized that the economic situation in Belarus is not dire: "most Belarusians realize they are economically better off than Ukrainians and Russians." (Note: Post understands that average salaries in Ukraine and Russia are higher than in Belarus, but Milinkevich's general argument remains valid.)

#### But There Is Room For Hope

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18. (C) Milinkevich said he will try to convince voters that they would be much better off under a different political and economic system. Moreover, he will argue that Lukashenko's version of stability is in fact unsustainable and undesirable. He commented that even a cemetery is stable; that does not mean you want to live there. Milinkevich knows many people are not happy with

the climate of fear that Lukashenko has created in society. He hopes he can project himself as an attractive alternative to Lukashenko Q a candidate more in keeping with Belarusian character, which is to be part of the world and not defiantly challenging it.

¶9. (C) The 10+ presidential candidate was optimistic that despite all the financial and human resources Lukashenko has at his disposal, democratic forces can still make significant progress in leading Belarus towards democratic change. Milinkevich stressed that Belarusians were the chief agents of political change in the country, but they could not do it alone. He greatly appreciated the U.S. approach to shine a light on Belarus, suggesting that international attention has an effect on domestic developments and should not diminish.

#### International Travel Will Be Limited To Key Countries

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¶10. (C) Milinkevich recognized that he needs to concentrate on building popular support and therefore spend most of his time in Belarus. However, he considered trips to a few key capitals necessary. (Note: Milinkevich noted his recent trip to Prague was arranged in May, prior to his 10+ nomination. He felt it was necessary to fulfill his obligation.)

¶11. (C) The 10+ candidate plans to visit Moscow in November. His team was trying to set up meetings for him with senior Russian officials, including with Deputy Prime Minister Surikov. He also hoped to meet deputies in the Duma, as well as hold interviews with the Russian press. Milinkevich aims to convince his Russian audience that he stands for solid reliable relations with Russia. (Note: Milinkevich thought Belarusian nationalist leader in exile Zenon Poznyak's recent statement that Milinkevich was not a

nationalist helped his cause in Russia and in Belarus, where the description nationalist is often publicly associated with fascism.)

¶12. (C) He also hoped to travel to Brussels to meet EU officials, preferably during the November 7 General Affairs and External Relations (GAERC) Ministerial. (Note: The UK Embassy in Minsk was trying to arrange for the participation of Milinkevich in the planned EU foreign ministers' discussion on Belarus.) Milinkevich agreed with Ambassador's suggestion that it may be useful for the 10+ nominee to meet with senior U.S. officials who will be in Brussels for U.S.-EU meetings during the same time period.

#### Lack Of A Cohesive PR Campaign Remains A Challenge

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¶13. (C) Milinkevich noted he has been unable to hire a good PR person with journalistic experience to develop the public relations strategy. (Comment: Milinkevich campaign team member recently told Pol/Econ Chief Dobrovolsky was handling Milinkevich's relations with the press. However, this position is likely a temporary responsibility for Dobrovolsky; his chief responsibility is campaign strategy.) Milinkevich noted there are many who would like to work for him but they need financial compensation.

#### Lack of Money Remains An Even Bigger Challenge

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¶14. (C) Milinkevich admitted his campaign was desperate for financial support. In fact, he apologized to Ambassador that the urgent need for resources was the main reason for his visit. Milinkevich said that his campaign has little money to launch voter outreach activities. He noted that he can get funding from those who invite him to travel abroad but he does not have enough money "even for

gas to travel to the outlying regions in Belarus." Using the limited resources he does have available, Milinkevich plans to travel to the nearby city of Baranovichi in early November to meet with voters in local markets and conduct press interviews, but he said he could do nothing more with current levels of assistance.

¶15. (C) The candidate is afraid people will forget about him and the 10+ coalition if his travel around the country is so limited. He noted some Belarusian businessmen have indicated their willingness to provide him financial support but only if his campaign gains traction with voters. Although Milinkevich repeatedly expressed his gratitude for the monetary and technical assistance he has received from U.S. and other NGOs, he stressed the 10+ coalition required an immediate infusion of resources to launch effectively his campaign.

#### More Coordination Among Donors Also Needed

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¶16. (C) Milinkevich also noted a lack of coordination among foreign donors. He was concerned that all the resources to help the democratic cause in Belarus were going to a wide variety of programs and activities, but he perceived the foreign NGOs knew little about what the other foreign NGOs were doing. He characterized the coordination issue as a serious problem that will significantly limit the opposition's prospects for promoting democratic change during the election. Ambassador assured Milinkevich the USG is actively working on this issue.

#### Comment

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¶17. (C) Alexander Milinkevich won the 10+ coalition's nomination for contender to President Lukashenko in the 2006 elections by just eight votes, and thus has had to work hard to keep the democratic alliance together. For the most part, Milinkevich's decision to place his former

competitors and their supporters in key positions in his campaign has paid off. The opposition candidate has the backing of a relatively unified coalition, in addition to the support he already enjoys from the local NGO community. But he is also cognizant of the repressive political environment in which he is forced to operate and the need to build up sufficient popular support that could lead to a popular rejection of Lukashenko. A key challenge for the Milinkevich team is resources, especially for the start up of the campaign. Without domestic sources, the campaign will depend on external resources to attract domestic support and staff.

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